

INTRODUCTION

Co-operation Ireland

Co-operation Ireland is a non-governmental organization, which has been working to build mutual understanding and peace on the Island of Ireland since 1979. Its particular focus has been on the development of relationships between the peoples of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland through contact and exchange programs. It aims to promote a value-based environment by creating spaces where people from different cultural and religious traditions can explore, understand and respect each other's differences on an island divided by national allegiances.

Civic-Link

Civic-Link is one of Co-operation Ireland's major education projects, and has been delivered in second level schools in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland since September 1999.

Civic-Link is a co-operative venture between schools in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, which are partnered on a one to one basis. Young people while undertaking a project in their own area, also approach it from the perspective of working jointly with their partner school. They present, share and learn through the medium of face-to-face residential exchanges and develop problem-solving strategies together.

The purpose of this interaction is to engender empathy and respect for another's viewpoint, and the confidence and ability to express one's own and other's ideas and perspectives. Essentially the project is about difference and equipping young people to embrace diversity by meeting and working with others from different backgrounds and traditions.

Key Theme

It is this rationale, which has informed the development of Civic-Link's increased focus on the issue of Conflict in its current phase of activities. In contrast to the first phase of Civic-Link where the selection of the Community issue was non-prescriptive, Civic-Link now selects a problem related specifically to an issue of conflict and division in their community.

Conflict is the product of differing and opposing views. The possible resolution of conflict necessitates agreement, compromise and mutual understanding. Through actively experiencing positive actions and outcomes in areas of conflict relating to themselves (through listening, presentation, representation, critical thinking, co-operation), and in attempting to find solutions at public policy level, young people can regard conflict as an opportunity for participation, movement and agreement.

Civic-Link views this not as an investigation of the negative, but as a very positive process. While our theme may be Conflict our motivation is Transformation.

U.S. Partnerships

It is in this context that we have widened our arena from the local and the national to the international, by expanding our school links to include U.S. schools. By encountering the “other” on this island, Civic-Link aims to foster an understanding of difference. In widening that dimension to include U.S. schools in our partnerships, it is envisaged that a richer perspective on diversity will be created. Opportunities will also be afforded to increase awareness among the respective partners, of the challenges and opportunities for developing Community and Civic engagement in diverse societies.

Project Delivery

The underlying philosophy of Civic-Link dictates that our way of engaging with the theme of Conflict and the project content, can be our first step towards transforming it. Essential to our delivery are the guiding principals, which inform our process i.e.

- 1) Facilitating young people to buy into the project through empathy and recognition
- 2) Enabling young people to relate to each other in positive and constructive ways, thereby facilitating them to engage and negotiate with others in different contexts subsequently.
- 3) Allowing young people to express themselves in different ways
- 4) Developing the art of representation
- 5) Developing the facility for reflection and analysis

The fostering of such skills necessitates teaching methodologies and approaches, tailored to deliver them.

Civic-Link Teaching Pack

The following pack is designed as a suggested pathway towards delivering the key elements and stages of the project. Teachers are encouraged to add, adapt or propose other approaches and activities, which would enhance the project’s implementation. Co-operation Ireland would welcome feedback and comments as you progress through the pack and for those who commit to getting involved in this project, we wish you every success.

On behalf of Co-operation Ireland and the Civic-Link Program

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